

Translating the Vietnam War: Cultural Networks between China and Vietnam (1964-1966)

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

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August 2019

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on the circulation of cultural products between China and Vietnam in the middle 1960s. By examining Vietnam's literary works and their Chinese adaptations, this study intends to explore three major questions: First, how was transnational imagination cultivated by adapting, translating, and viewing cultural products from other nations? Second, how does domestic politics interact with cultural importation to shape people's transnational imagination? Furthermore, how do socialist regimes, such as China and Vietnam, reconcile the conceptual entanglement between transnational proletarian identification and national emotion in their cultural practice? By answering this question, the study will not only situate Chinese cultural production during the Cold War era in a transnational network but also aim at contributing to translation studies. The study will show how cultural translation helps to construct a socialist internationalist imagination. The thesis uses three sections to scrutinize the formation and implication of the cultural networks between China and Vietnam in the mid of 1960s. The first section will briefly analyze how Hanoi's Foreign Languages Publishing House addressed Chinese audiences through the practice of translation, and how cultural importation from North Vietnam affected Chinese audiences in the middle 1960s. The second section will examine how socialist community was constructed between China and Vietnam through analyzing how Chinese artists and writers adapted the Vietnamese patriotic story, *Live as He Lived*. By adapting Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story into a comic book, stage drama, and local opera, Chinese intellectuals transformed the Vietnamese patriotic figure into a socialist hero. Moreover, this translated socialist character was also accepted and acknowledged by North Vietnam, functioning as an ideological tool to encourage Vietnam's young people to participate in socialist construction. The third section will explore the role of anti-revisionist ideology in directing the

cultural translations and adaptations between China and Vietnam. I will argue that the anti-revisionist ideology against the Soviet Union drew a border within the socialist bloc, and thereby consolidated the transnational identification between China and Vietnam.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

From 2017 to 2019, Anke Wang pursued her M.A. degree in Asian Studies at Cornell University. Prior to coming to Cornell, Anke Wang got her B.A. degree in Chinese Language and Literature from Shandong Normal University in 2017. Her research interests include: nationalism, communist movement, literature and translation studies, modern and contemporary Chinese literature & history, Sino-Vietnam relation, etc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my most profound appreciation to numerous professors and friends who have inspired and supported me during my study at Cornell University. I particularly appreciate my committee members, Professor Nick Admussen and Professor Keith Taylor. It is their generous support and encouragement that helped me to find the entry of my academic journey. Professor Tamara Loos, Anne Blackburn, Viranjini Munasinghe also provided invaluable suggestions on developing and revising this work. My enthusiastic and experienced Vietnamese instructor, Thuy Tranviet, also helped me a lot in building up my language skill. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who always respect my choices and support my decisions.

Translating the Vietnam War: Cultural Networks between China and Vietnam (1964-1966)

In Zhang Xianliang's novel *Getting Used to Dying* (1989), the protagonist, a writer from China, comes across a Vietnamese prostitute in New York. After learning where she is from, the protagonist expresses his affection: "So that means we're comrades in addition to being brothers, doesn't it? (Zhang 280)" At the time the novel takes place, ten years have passed since the American troops withdrew from Vietnam, but wartime political rhetoric still remains fresh to the characters. This meeting reminds the protagonist of his perception of Vietnam during the period of the Cultural Revolution:

Even in the labor camps, the moment Vietnam or the Ho Chi Minh Trail was mentioned, this phrase would spring to the mind of every convict. The only translated work of foreign literature that hundreds of millions of Chinese were allowed to read in those years was a piece entitled 'Letters from South Vietnam.' Even labor reform convicts in China felt an instinctive obligation to support the Vietnamese in the Anti-American War (280).

Why is the protagonist, who was forced to accept re-education in the labor camp during the Cultural Revolution, willing to sacrifice for the embattled Vietnamese? How has he cultivated an affection for people who were nationally, linguistically, and geographically distant? What shapes his political consciousness and transnational imagination? This thesis will focus on the circulation of cultural products between China and Vietnam in the middle 1960s. This period was the time when the Vietnam War had been intensified by The Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Rolling Thunder event. These military actions not only marked the de facto invasion of North

Vietnam by the U.S. Air Force and Navy,¹ but also attracted intense attention in China and other Third World countries. In 1965, which modern Chinese literary scholars describe as the signal year for Vietnamese literature in China, Chinese translations of Vietnamese literature were vastly more numerous and more important than the translations of literatures from other nations.² In 1966, Beijing held an emergency meeting of Afro-Asian writers, announcing the latest task of Afro-Asian intellectuals—to devote themselves to supporting the anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam.³ By examining Vietnam's literary works and their Chinese adaptations, this study intends to explore three major questions: First, how was transnational imagination cultivated by adapting, translating, and viewing cultural products from other nations? Second, how does domestic politics interact with cultural importation to shape people's transnational imagination? Furthermore, how do socialist regimes, such as China and Vietnam, reconcile the conceptual entanglement between transnational proletarian identification and national emotion in their cultural practice? By answering this question, the study will not only situate Chinese cultural

¹ See Kort, Michael. *The Vietnam War Reexamined*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, Kort takes the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Rolling Thunder events as the threshold of Americanization of the Vietnam War.

² In his study of the Sino-Vietnam literary exchange in the “seventeen-year” era, Li Guangyi points out that the time between 1964 and 1965 is the summit of Vietnamese literary imports. In 1965, publishing institutions in China translated and circulated over 20 types of Vietnamese cultural products, including collections of literary works, films, memoirs of revolutionary figures, and reportage. See Li, Guangyi. “*Nanfang Laixin: Yuenan Xiandai Wenxue zai Zhongguo de Yijie he Chuanbo*.” *Open Times (Kaifang Shidai)* 2 (2018): 134-142. Wang Yougui also highlights the significant role of translated Vietnamese literature in the years before the Cultural Revolution, regarding 1965 as “the year of Vietnamese literature.” See Wang, Yougui. *20 Shi Ji Xia Ban Ye Zhongguo Fan Yi Wen Xue Shi: 1949-1977 = A History of Foreign Literatures in Chinese Language in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: 1949-1977*. Di 1 ban., Ren min chu ban she, 2015.

³ See Zhongguo fu li hui. *China Reconstructs*. China Welfare Institute, 1989, pp38

production during the Cold War era in a transnational network but also aim at contributing to translation studies. The study will show how cultural translation helps to construct a socialist internationalist imagination.

During the Cold War era, the cultural interaction between China and Vietnam⁴ played a prominent role in shaping both Chinese and Vietnamese people's imagination of a socialist community. However, this interaction does not gain much attention from scholars of relevant disciplines. Although some literary scholars have started to break the disciplinary boundaries of national literature, taking Chinese socialist literature as a cultural practice closely interacting with global, post-war anti-colonial tendencies and the unitary, binary worldview of the Cold

⁴ From the late 1950s to 1960s, cultural institutions in China imported a great number of literary works from Vietnam. At the same time, the cultural department in the government also sent writers and reporters to South Vietnam to gain firsthand experience of the Vietnam War. From 1963 to 1965, the China Writer's Association 中国作家协会 selected 20 writers and sent them to South Vietnam to collect news materials. In addition to news reporters from the military, the visiting group also included script writers such as Xu Huaizhong 徐怀中 and Cong Shen 丛深, as well as several leaders of the Writer's Association such as Ba Jin 巴金, Wei Wei 魏巍, Du Xuan 杜宣 and Han Zi 菡子. While the group of writers and journalists was visiting Vietnam, translators and literary scholars in China also showed an increasing interest in contemporary Vietnamese literature. The October 1963 issue of World Literature 世界文学, a journal belonging to the Writers Association and playing a significant role in communicating with foreign writers, was marked as a Special Issue on Vietnamese Literature 越南文学专号. Besides official journals, publishing houses also engaged in translating and introducing Vietnamese literature. In 1964, the Writer's Press 作家出版社 published two poetry collections, *The Hurricane* 暴风 and *South Vietnam at War* 战斗的南越. The former is comprised of 13 poems by Tô Hữu, the vice president of the Association of Literature and Art in North Vietnam. The latter includes 53 poems by 31 poets from both North and South Vietnam.

War⁵, few of them focus particularly on the cultural diplomacy between China and Vietnam.⁶

The neglect of Sino-Vietnam cultural interaction during the Vietnam War not only leaves our understanding of the international cultural network of the Cold War incomplete, but also fails to scrutinize how the two socialist regimes deal with the potential conflict between socialist internationalism and nationalism in their diplomatic discourse and propagandist rhetoric.⁷

⁵ The transnationality of Chinese socialist literature is well studied by Paola Iovene and Nicolai Volland. In the second chapter of her book, *Tales of Futures Past: Anticipation and the Ends of Literature in Contemporary China*, Iovene contours the ideological transition of *Yiwen* (*Shijie Wenxue*), a journal designed to introduce foreign literature to Chinese readers. She argues that the world literature introduced by the journal experienced a thematic and geographical shift from the coexistence of European modernism and socialist realism to anti-colonial literature from third world countries, which indicates the crucial role of translation in shaping readers' world imagination. In his *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: the Chinese Literary Universe, 1945-1965*, Nicolai Volland also analyzes the socialist identification in the domain of world literature. By historicizing the circulation and translation of cultural products between China and the other countries in the socialist bloc during the Cold War, he points out three defining traits of "socialist cosmopolitanism": the valorization of the collective, the role of the national within the transnational, and the emancipatory ideal of egalitarianism, which challenges the prevalent global cultural hegemony and tries to construct a socialist world order (Volland 13). Studying socialist literature from an institutional perspective, Volland effectively elaborates how the state institutions and diplomatic policies participated in defining the socialist self and its others through guiding translation activities, publishing literary journals, and organizing international writers' conferences. Volland's detailed research highlights political forces in shaping socialist transnationality. However, neither of these scholars talks about literary exchanges between China and Vietnam in detail.

⁶ Li Guangyi has contributed to the study of the circulation and translation of Vietnamese literature in China since the Latinization of Vietnamese (quốc ngữ). He provides us an overview of Sino-Vietnamese cultural exchange from 19th century to 1960s. In the section of introducing the circulation of Vietnamese literature in the "seventeen-year" period, he particularly focuses on the translation of *Letters from the South*, the text I will also analyze in the following thesis. Compared to Li's study, which mainly focuses on archiving the items of cultural products adapted from *Letters*, my research provides detailed interpretation of textual, contextual, and ideological dimensions of the work. See Li, Guangyi. "Nanfang Laixin: Yuenan Xiandai Wenxue zai Zhongguo de Yijie he Chuanbo." *Open Times* (Kaifang Shidai) 2 (2018): 134-142.

⁷ The relationship between socialism and nationalism presented in Chinese literary works has been examined by few scholars. Scholarly works of this topic mainly focus on how the cultural products present the socialist self and non-socialist others in the domestic domain. In Cai Xiang's analysis of socialist literature in Mao's China, he questions the argument held by Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Ernest Gellner that socialist identification will be eventually swallowed by the nationalist discourse, emphasizing that "In the experience of the Chinese revolution, class discourse was a strong presence, and it maintained a constant vigilance with relation to the development of national discourse. Whenever national discourse strayed from its designated post, class discourse would wage struggle with it. (Cai 38)" He then takes narration about the Sino-Japanese War in 1950s China as an example, examining how writers put national enemies and class enemies onto the two sides of one coin: "the enemy

Historians also have attempted to reconstruct 1960s' Chinese history by looking at internationalist discourses in domestic politics. Christopher Tang's dissertation re-examines the making of the Cultural Revolution by tracing the CCP's preparatory propaganda in the early-to-mid-1960s. He constructs a cause-effect relationship between internationalist storytelling and the domestic revolutionary sphere: the CCP launched internationalist propaganda to save socialist beliefs compromised by the failure of the Great Leap Movement in the late 1950s. In this sense, the CCP's practice of spreading revolutionary tales from Asia, Africa, and Latin America intends to redeem the unsuccessful domestic socialist experience through recapturing the legitimacy of the worldwide class struggle. This propagandist practice, which Tang calls "domestic internationalism," helps to form Chinese audiences' imagination of "a vast, worldwide community of revolutionaries and progressive people all moving forward together... This community constituted the overwhelming majority of the world's people and their march forward was thus on the right side of history, as it always had been." Moreover, domestic internationalism connects Chinese audiences with the worldwide revolutionary moment in a synchronic fashion—"the local was tied to the global, in real time no less. (Tang 16)" Although Tang's dissertation effectively lays out the role of worldwide revolutions in making the Cultural Revolution, the transnational ideological interaction still moves along a unidirectional path towards the nation-state. That is to say, in Tang's analytical schema, China is the exclusive

of the nation must at the same time be the class enemy; or, put differently, the class enemy inevitably becomes the enemy of the nation. For this reason, a relatively common narrative model is that this kind of enemy has a bloody history of suppressing peasants or being anticommunist, and during the national war of course naturally collaborated with the [Japanese] invaders. (Cai 40)" In the socialist imagination of the Sino-Japanese War, the invaders are not only the other of the nation but also the other of class. To Cai, class identification and national identity can exist simultaneously.

subject that brings world revolutions into the domestic political sphere. This schema hides other Afro-Asian nations' agency in exporting revolutionary literature and discourse.

To draw a more complete map of cultural transportation between China and Vietnam during the Cold War era, I will not only focus on how Chinese audiences' transnational imagination was formed by the reading and rewriting of foreign revolutionary cultural products, but also examine how cultural and diplomatic institutions in North Vietnam translated their anti-imperialist ideology to Chinese audiences. Interestingly, the Chinese adaptations of North Vietnam's cultural products were also circulated back to Vietnam through diplomatic interaction, serving as an ideological tool to confirm the shared socialist ideology between two states. This cultural dynamic between China and North Vietnam indicates that the transnational imagination of Chinese audiences was cooperatively constructed by the two socialist regimes.

Moreover, North Vietnam's agency in translating and exporting its cultural products provokes us to rethink the implication of translation in a post-colonial context. Scholars of (post)colonial studies tend to identify the practice of translation as a conquest of knowledge imposed by translators. In Vicente Rafael's analysis of Spanish missionaries' translation of Christian texts into Tagalog, he points out that to acquire the local language and to make the Word of God translatable to the indigenous people, the missionaries reconstructed Tagalog in the system of Latin grammar. The local language was codified through the eyes of colonizers, and was understood by them through the imposed medium of Christianity. Thus, the Spanish practice of translation produced a colonial hierarchy of languages: "[the local languages] were positioned as structural derivatives of Latin, the language of the Catholic Church and thus of those deemed closest to God; and they were made comprehensible through the mediation of Castilian, the

language of the state, and thus closest to the king. (Rafael 88)⁸ In the post-colonial era, this colonial hierarchy was transformed into an implicit form of conquest, which entitled the early-developed-countries to translate subaltern experience into universal values, extending the hierarchy of the colonial era.⁹ The universal norms of knowledge-production made by previous colonial powers, such as secular time and the system of the nation-state, still shaped how scholars, even indigenous intellectuals, discuss our colonial post, swallowing the voice of subalterns.

However, in contrast to colonial translations of indigenous knowledge that intend to digest other languages into the translator's discourse, North Vietnam's literary exportation functions as a strategy of decolonization¹⁰ that inverts the power relationship that existed in

⁸ Relevant research about colonial translation can be also found in Bernard Cohn's *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India*. Princeton University Press, 1996. In the chapter of *The Command of Language and the Language of Command*, the author examines how the British colonizers studied and theorized Indian languages. "The command of language" indicates that the British colonizers framed Indian languages in a structure of European knowledge. The general linguistic rules such as grammar, syntax and phonology are applied to systematize the local languages. "The language of command" indicates that British colonizers' translation of the local language into European grammatical system is also a strategic advantage that enabled them to more effectively regulate local people.

⁹ About the post-colonial critique of translation and universal history, see Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. New ed., Princeton University Press, 2008. In his study of how postcolonial scholars translated subaltern history into a language of social science, Dipesh Chakrabarty points out two models of translation. The first model of translation is a process of barter that is based on one-for-one exchanges. This barterlike translation can bypass the act of homogenizing and universalizing, through which Hindu's Ram can be directly translated into Islam's Rahim without relying on the analytical term of religion. The second model of translation refers to the generalized exchange of commodities that "always needs the mediation of a universal, homogenizing middle term. (Chakrabarty 85)" Chakrabarty then takes Marx's theory of abstract labor as a schema that can epitomize the act of homogenizing. The conceptual invention of abstract labor which intends to generalize the different capacities of human labors thus plays an important role in producing exchange value that allows various commodities to circulate in a universal temporality of capital. Chakrabarty examines the common logic shared by translation and the exchange of commodities in order to criticize the colonial discourse that translated the subaltern's experience into a universal, homogeneous history.

¹⁰ As Douglas Robinson has suggested, decolonization refers to a process of "undoing the more harmful effects of colonization, especially the collective inferiority complex— the former colony's sense of being less modern, less educated, less intelligent, less cultured, less civilized than the former imperial power." See Robinson, Douglas. *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained*. St. Jerome, 1997. pp.115 In the domain of Chinese literary studies, the topic of decolonization has been examined by Xiong Hui. He takes the cultural

colonizing translations like those of the Spanish in the Philippines. Cultural products about the Vietnam War circulating among Chinese audiences were first translated into Chinese by the publishing house in Hanoi. North Vietnam took the initiative to represent the war situation and spread their revolutionary spirit to their big socialist brother. It is a practice of outward translation that the translator seized the agency of translating its native language, deciding what kinds of indigenous texts and political ideologies are accessible to foreign readers.

We can therefore see two roles played by the translation of Vietnamese material into Chinese in the middle 60s. First, it is a medium of imagining a transnational socialist community. Second, it is a strategic act of anti-imperialist, de-colonial propaganda. These two roles interact with each other, for it is the domestic political sphere that decides what kind of cultural products can be exported to other countries or imported for domestic audiences. In this sense, the practice of translation is regulated by the states' ideology and required to serve domestic politics. Translation is premised on linguistic differences, but the action of translating is also a process of dissolving and suturing the differences. In the case of state-oriented practice of translation and cultural circulation between China and Vietnam, to suture the difference is to design a common code for constructing collective identification—what shared characteristics can be chosen as the basis of collective identity between national communities? How should the state construct this commonality? Cultural products often allow for multiple interpretations, but socialist states in the 1960s mostly preferred to direct readers' interpretation and understanding of the translated

importation from the Soviet Union and Afro-Asian countries in early PRC era as a process of decolonization. Although Xiong innovatively provides a new perspective to approach literary translation in China, his study neglects the possibility of neo-imperialism within the socialist bloc. See Xiong Hui. "Shiqinian" Fanyi Wenxue de Jiezhiminhua. *Wenxue Pinglun* 4(2015):99-106.

works through a very particular framework of socialist collective identification. This attempt to guide the readers' understanding is clearest in the introductions, reviews and adaptations written by politicians and writers working for cultural bureaus and published in state media.

The thesis uses three sections to scrutinize the formation and implication of the cultural networks between China and Vietnam in the mid of 1960s. The major texts I will analyze are two translated Vietnamese literary works: a popular epistolary novel, *Letters from the South*, and a patriot's biography, *Live as He Lived*. Through tracing the circulations and adaptations of the two texts, I will touch on the role of translation in constructing transnational imagination and how domestic politics directed the cultural circulation. The first section will briefly analyze how Hanoi's Foreign Languages Publishing House addressed Chinese audiences through the practice of translation, and how cultural importation from North Vietnam affected Chinese audiences in the middle 1960s. The second section will examine how socialist community was constructed between China and Vietnam through analyzing how Chinese artists and writers adapted the Vietnamese patriotic story, *Live as He Lived*. By adapting Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story into a comic book, stage drama, and local opera, Chinese intellectuals transformed the Vietnamese patriotic figure into a socialist hero. Moreover, this translated socialist character was also accepted and acknowledged by North Vietnam, functioning as an ideological tool to encourage Vietnam's young people to participate in socialist construction. The third section will explore the role of anti-revisionist ideology in directing the cultural translations and adaptations between China and Vietnam. I will argue that the anti-revisionist ideology against the Soviet Union drew a border within the socialist bloc, and thereby consolidated the transnational identification between China and Vietnam.

The Translatability of a Fatherland

In the winter of 1965, Beijing held a gala to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the National Liberation Front of Southern Vietnam. The gala was cooperatively organized by the cultural and diplomatic institutions of the PRC, including the Ministry of Culture, the Association of China-Vietnam Friendship, and the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in Beijing. The primary section of the gala was a stage drama about a Vietnamese hero, Nguyễn Văn Trỗi, who tried to assassinate United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, but failed and was executed in Saigon's prison. Directed and performed by Beijing People's Artistic Theatre, the drama performed patriotic sentiment among Vietnamese people to both the representatives from the embassy of North Vietnam and hundreds and thousands of Chinese students and workers.¹¹

The stage drama is adapted from Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's biography named *Live as He Lived* (Sống Như Anh 1965) narrated by his widow, Phan Thị Quyên. As the title suggests, this biography is not so much a panoramic depiction of Trỗi's entire life, but is a revolutionary lesson focusing on his anti-imperialist resolve. Phan Thị Quyên begins the biography by complaining about Trỗi's indifference towards domestic life, and expressing her reservations about participating in the anti-American struggle. After learning that Saigon's police had arrested her husband for his assassination plot, she rushed to the prison to find Trỗi, but was also jailed, which gave her the opportunity to talk with revolutionary prisoners and learn about the heroic acts of her husband. Phan Thị Quyên's narration indicates her transformation from a woman

¹¹ The introduction of this anniversary can be found in *People's Daily* issued on December 19th in 1965. See *People's Daily*, December 19th, 1965: 4

working within the domestic space to a revolutionary figure firmly resolved to fight for national reunification.

The writers from Beijing People's Artistic Theatre highlight Phan Thị Quyên's patriotic spirit by designing poetic language to stress the trope of the fatherland. In the opening scene of the drama, a Chinese actress stands in front of the flag of the Việt Cộng, crying in the voice of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's wife:

Vietnam! My dear fatherland!

You are standing in the fire,

My burning fatherland,

Fighting fatherland,

Glorious fatherland! (Yu et al. 1)

This prologue, infused with patriotic emotion for Vietnam yet spoken by a Chinese actress, presents the semantic complexity and ideological ambiguity of the fatherland—whose fatherland were they venerating? The performance and its context necessarily pluralize the term's referent. Performed on the diplomatic stage in honor of the anniversary of the National Liberation Front of Southern Vietnam, it not only indicates the territory of a unified Vietnam projected by the heroine but also reveals a universal acknowledgment of the dignity of national sovereignty, intending to arouse patriotic empathy from the Chinese audience. Through translation, the Vietnamese people's nationalist struggle can be reproduced as Chinese theatre and the specificity of the fatherland can become a shared anti-imperialist value.

Beijing People's Artistic Theatre is not the only agency that makes the fatherland translatable. The biography of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi was first translated into Chinese and introduced

to Chinese readers by Hanoi's Foreign Languages Publishing House (Nhà Xuất Bản Ngoại Văn Việt Nam) in 1965. Established in 1955,¹² the publishing house was founded to project a positive image of the newly formed government of North Vietnam and to strengthen the discourse of unifying Vietnam through translating Vietnamese literature, speeches, records of the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP), and introductions to Vietnam's culture and history in foreign languages such as English, Russian, Chinese, French, and Spanish. The political task of the publishing house was clearly announced in a 1965 publication named *Vietnam Today*, a pamphlet that provides an overview of Vietnam's geography, culture, history, and socialist transformations:

By their solidarity and patriotism and with support from the people of the world, the Vietnamese people are struggling victoriously against a fierce enemy: U.S. imperialism.

Readers and friends of many countries including the U.S.A who have been following this struggle with sympathy and whole-hearted support, suggested us to provide them information regarding other aspects of our country and people. We have endeavored to put into this cover what may interest them (*Vietnam Today* 9).¹³

This message suggests the publishers' agency in translating the history and political culture about Vietnam. Instead of simply presenting the "national culture" in a self-orientalist manner, the HFLPH emphasizes the state's unified sovereignty and anti-imperialist discourse in

¹² According to a pamphlet introducing the catalogue of HFLPH's publications, the earliest publication of the publishing house came out in 1955. See *Vietnam Foreign Languages Publishing House: Excerpts from the Catalogue*, 1957-1987. Nhà xuất bản Ngoại văn Việt Nam, 1987, pp11

¹³ Based on the WorldCat Libraries database, *Vietnam Today* was published in English, Chinese, French, and the Spanish. See Nhà Xuất Bản Ngoại Văn (Hanoi, Vietnam). *Vietnam Today*. Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1965; *Jin Ri De Yue Nan*. He nei: Yue nan wai wen chu ban she, 1966; *Le Vietnam D'aujourd'hui*. Hanoi: Editions en Langues Étrangères, 1965; *El Vietnam De Hoy*. Hanoi: Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras, 1967.

the translation. The pamphlet takes revolutionary spirit as an intrinsic national character of the Vietnamese people, depicting historical events such as the Trung sisters' struggle against invasion by the Han dynasty (AD 40) as patriotic acts. Their heroic spirits are typified as predictors of the success of the anti-American war and the triumph of national reunification (Vietnam Today 24). Moreover, Vietnamese culture is introduced in a revolutionary narration with a de-colonial logic. The pamphlet stresses how the anti-colonial revolution contributed to artistic production, taking the artistic production after the August Revolution as "a real renaissance" that rescued the Vietnamese national culture from "centuries of feudal domination and nearly a hundred years of colonialism. (130)"

In contrast to the postcolonial studies' analysis of translation that takes non-westerners as unspeakable objects which are always waiting to be translated by Westerners, the HFLPH's self-translation of the fatherland actively seeks international sympathy for the anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam. This expectation is epitomized in HFLPH's practice of publishing and circulating the novella *Letters from the South* (1964).

Letters from the South is a collection of letters written to people living in North Vietnam during the wartime by their family members in the South. Despite the official discourse that treated the letters as authentic correspondence between friends and family members, the structure of the volumes and the contents of the letters reveal fictional qualities. Textually, the *Letters from the South* feature consistency in structure and variety in content. The collection is composed of varied stories, but each of the letters in the collection shares a similar narrative form. Every single letter tells an independent story with a unique theme, introduces heroic stories from South Vietnam and reveals atrocities committed by American troops. Unlike private letters that circulate between family members and friends, which normally focus on telling the stories of

individuals, the *Letters* narrate heroic stories in a collective voice. Although the alleged target readers of these letters are “Dear daddy”, “My dear brother”, “Beloved sister Loan”, “Sonny” and “My darling”, the senders always take themselves as agents of the South and take their readers as representatives of the North, reenvisioning private correspondence as a form of collective expression.

First published by Hanoi’s Cultural Publishing House (Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học) in 1964, the Vietnamese title of the book means “letters from the front of the fatherland” (Tờ Tuyên Đấu Tổ Quốc). The first Chinese volume of letters was translated and published by Hanoi’s Foreign Language Publishing House in January 1964. Later, the Writers’ Publishing House in Beijing (Zuojia Chubanshe) published the second volume in July. To address Chinese audiences, the HFLPH translated the title of the collection as *Letters from the South* (Nanfang Laixin). This translation suggests how the publishing institution in Hanoi identified themselves in relation to China. By replacing *fatherland* with *the south*, the HFLPH blurs the national boundary between China and Vietnam, remapping the geographical relationship between the addressors and the addressees—the letters in the collection are not only written by people from South Vietnam to their family members in the North, but also represent the voice of Vietnam addressing its socialist brother in the north.

The HFLPH also used different ways to address its audience in the prefaces. The preface of the Vietnamese version of *Letters* published for readers in Hanoi stresses the connection between the anti-American struggle in the South and the socialist project in the North. It explains why the publishing house takes South Vietnam as the front of the country: “the socialist construction in the North will be a great support for liberating the South. However, construction still has many difficulties. It would be a priceless treasure [for the people in the North] to get the

spirits of struggle as well as the new heroism from the sincere and profound letters written by the people from South Vietnam. (Từ Tuyến Đầu Tổ Quốc 4)” The conclusion of the preface stresses Vietnam’s domestic politics in a more direct way: “recently, people in the North are actively supporting Chairman Hồ’s proposal that ‘each person should do two peoples’ work’ *mỗi người làm việc bằng hai*, participating in the mission of ‘constructing and protecting the North as well as supporting the task of liberating the South’ *xây dựng và bảo vệ miền Bắc, tích cực ủng hộ cách mạng giải phóng miền Nam...* [The publishers] hope that our endeavor of publishing the book will greatly benefit the nation’s interest. (4)” In the second Vietnamese volume of *Letters*, the preface keeps emphasizing the spiritual importance of South Vietnam in encouraging the socialist construction of the North: “The letters from the south are the most significant spiritual source for encouraging us, which enhances the power of socialist construction in the North, becoming a solid basis for the nationwide struggle. (Từ Tuyến Đầu Tổ Quốc: Thư miền Nam gửi ra Tập II 7)”

The preface in the Chinese version of *Letters* expands the range of addressees to worldwide audiences. It stresses that the effort of circulating the letters should be attributed to people from the third world countries: “...hundreds of thousands of letters were sent from the south to the north. However, due to the blockade of the river Sông Bến Hải, the military boundary that separates the country, many letters have to cross national boundaries, taking cars, trains, ships, and airplanes to travel across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and then finally get to Hanoi. These letters are like a flock of birds wandering around the world, finding their ways home. (Nanfang Laixin 1).” Compared to the Vietnamese version, whose preface primarily focuses on mobilizing people in North Vietnam to engage in socialist construction, the preface of the Chinese version highlights the revolutionary optimism of South Vietnam, taking it as a spiritual

power that can encourage people around the world to struggle against the “immoral force”—imperialism (Nanfang Laixin 4).

Although there is no concrete evidence to show if the letters from South Vietnam were really circulated transcontinentally before arriving at Hanoi, this preface suggests North Vietnam’s hope to consolidate anti-imperialist solidarity with the rest of the world. In the transnational circuit of *Letters from the South*, Hanoi is both the destination and the point of departure. For one thing, the separation between the north and the south blocked transportation within the national territory, which forced the letters to take a transnational detour before being delivered to their receivers in the north. For another, after arriving at Hanoi, these letters were collected and translated into different languages for readers around the world¹⁴. The third world’s role in delivering the letters to North Vietnam, alongside the HFLPH’s initiative of translating the letters to audiences around the world, represent the compatibility of transnationality and nationality—it is the transnational collaboration of delivering the letters that enables people in North Vietnam to imagine a national community through reading the letters from the south; it is Hanoi’s effort of translating the letters that seeks anti-imperialist allies to support the fight for national survival.

The HFLPH’s rewrite of the preface for Chinese audiences suggests the strategic power of translation. The publisher seems to assume that translated texts that feature direct address to worldwide audiences have the potential to arouse transnational identification. This view

¹⁴ In addition to Chinese, *Letters from the South* was also translated into English (*Letters from South Vietnam*. Hanoi: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1963.), French (*Lettres Du Sud Viet Nam*. [2. Éd.], Éditions en langues étrangères, 1964.) and Indonesian (Thio, Hsiao Ning. *Djuang Dan Derita Di Vietnam Selatan =: Letters from South Vietnam: dokumen2 Perdjoangan Jang Heroik / Diindonesiakan Dari teks2 Bahasa Perantjis Dan Inggris Oleh Thio Hsiao Ning*. Tjahaja Kumala, 1964)

provokes us to rethink Benedict Anderson's theory about print capitalism and the making of imagined communities. Anderson argues that the imagination of national community is based on the experience of homogeneous, empty time. Homogeneous, empty time, he writes, is a conception of transverse and cross-time simultaneity that is different from medieval Messianic time. This transverse simultaneity is a sense of "meanwhile", "marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar." (Anderson 24) Anderson further illustrates this point by analyzing how novelists unify diverse acts performed by different individuals "at the same clocked, calendrical time", though the actors "may be largely unaware of one another (Anderson 25)." The simultaneous temporality embedded in the novel shows the imagined world conjured up by the author in the readers' minds. Anderson points out that this temporal conception is one of the origins of national imagination:

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analog of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity (Anderson 26).

However, another layer of Anderson's argument should not be neglected. Secular literature, from Anderson's perspective, not only becomes an analogue of the nation and represents the national consciousness of the author, but also trains its audience to imagine a solid and trustworthy community, a basis for nationalism. The textual examples provided by Anderson, which include nationalist novels published in Spanish colonial Philippines, as well as newspapers circulating between creoles in colonial provinces in South America and their

European metropolises, restrict his theorizing to particular vernacular communities, and stresses linguistic homogeneity. Imagined communities produced by translated literature need further study.¹⁵ If secular literature like novels and newspapers can represent the idea of the nation, and if readers can form a national imagination by reading literature, how will they react after reading texts imported from distant nations? Is it possible for people to imagine communities, whether they be associations of socialist nations or the global proletarian class, that transcend national boundaries? What is the mechanism of this transnational identification?

I investigate these questions by analyzing Chinese readers' practice of reading and rewriting. From their comments on *Letters* and its adaptations, we can see that the Chinese readers not only showed their sympathy for the people from South Vietnam, but also linked the sufferings of Vietnamese people with the historical events and the contemporary challenges of China, positioning the senders of letters along the same linear path towards a destined socialist

¹⁵ Ernesto Laclau and Jonathan Culler have questioned Anderson's theory about imagined communities. Laclau questions the category of communities: "There is a certain ambiguity in Anderson's approach, for many times we don't know whether he is referring to the nation as a specific imagined community or whether he is speaking about any imagined community, about the category of imagined community in general (unless he is asserting that the only possible imagined community is the nation, which I hardly think could be his position)." (Laclau 23) Jonathan Culler points out the limits of imagining a nation through novels: "There is some ambiguity in Anderson's discussions about whether it is important that the space or community evoked by the novel be that of a nation: does it simply present an analogue to the nation, or does it characteristically represent this nation in particular?" (Culler 33) Culler also indicates the preconditions that allow readers to imagine a national community through reading novels. First, the novel should be narrated in an omniscient perspective which breaks the limitation of the single viewpoint. Second, the writer of the novel should write for her national fellows. Both Laclau and Culler did not deny the possibility of imagining a community through print capitalism. However, the genre of the novel, as well as the key notion of community, should be qualified. Just as Culler has argued: "If we try to argue that the novel, through its representations of nationhood, made the nation, we will find ourselves on shaky ground, but if we argue that the novel was a condition of possibility for imagining something like a nation, for imagining a community that could be opposed to another, as friend to foe, and thus a condition of possibility of a community organized around a political distinction between friend and enemy, then we are on less dubious ground..." (49) My project intends to further qualify the notion of community through entering the domain of translation.

liberation of the proletariat. Here, the fatherland of Vietnam, as well as the patriotism of *Letters*, were translated into both nationalist empathy and socialist sympathy.

After reading *Letters from the South*, Zang Kejia, the major editor of a poetry periodical *Shikan*, wrote a set of poems to record his reading experience. At the beginning of the first poem, *Longing for Tomorrow*, Zang frankly expresses his general impression of *Letters*: “When I read these words of anger and grief, I take myself as the recipient. Their words touch my heart, and their cry haunts my ears.” Assuming a role as the recipient of the letters, Zang shows his sympathy for the Southern people in the first half of the poem: “I cannot stop crying, as we are suffering heart by heart.” He then changes his narrative persona in the fifth stanza, becoming a representative of South Vietnamese communists and redesigning the image of self through the lens of Other: “I put the gun down and pick up the pen, expressing my feelings to my family in the remote North.” From the poem, we can see that Zang regards socialist North Vietnam as “a place of hope” where the revolutionary “red light” is flashing (Zang 20). For the people in the South, the object of anticipation is not only a geographical and spatial conception of reunification with the North but also an image that foreshadows their socialist future.

In an essay published in the December 1963 issue of *People's Education*, the author talks about how to instruct students to read pedagogical texts. She takes *Letters from the South* as a positive example, for it can “promote students’ class consciousness” (Huang 43). She further argues that, after reading the *Letters*, many students wrote responses like this: “those letters remind me of the Taiwanese people who are suffering from American-Jiang Association’s abuse and other repressed nations in the world who are enduring the imperialists’ mistreatment. Therefore, I should follow Chairman Mao’s instruction, dedicating my entire life to the great mission of liberating our proletarian comrades. (Huang 43)” Published in an official educational

periodical, this essay reveals the expected propagandist effect of *Letters from the South* work—the importation of Vietnam’s nationalist literature is a way to arouse Chinese readers’ nationalist feelings. Here, the *Letters*’ expectation for unifying Vietnam is translated into the Chinese audiences’ anticipation for unifying Taiwan based on their nationalist empathy.

Nevertheless, this nationalist empathy is regulated in a rhetoric of class struggle. The students’ review attributed the separation of the nation to the binary framework of the global proletariat versus imperialism—both Taiwan and Vietnam were confronting the same imperialist enemy. In a report recording a students’ meeting of reading *Letters from the South*, a student from Yutian, a small county in Hebei province, regarded the reading experience as “a profound education of internationalism and class consciousness.” (Jun and Chun 43) However, this internationalist education still drove the student to think about national history and domestic politics: “I feel today’s struggle in Vietnam is very similar to how our national struggle against the American-Jiang Association before liberation in 1949. Therefore, I feel great warmth when I read these letters. The Vietnamese people have the power to defeat their enemies. Their struggle is a great invigoration to us.” (43) In the cases of students’ response, the transnational imagination was achieved by the nationalist empathy, while the nationalist concerns expressed by the socialist China rested their legitimacy on the commonality of class identity.

The Circulation of a Socialist Hero

The translations and adaptations of *Letters from the South* reveal the transnationally shared notion of the fatherland and the commonality of proletarian identity. This entanglement between socialism and nationalism is also represented by the circulation of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi’s

story. This section will examine the construction of socialist commonality between China and Vietnam by analyzing how Chinese artists and writers adapted the Vietnamese patriotic story *Live as He Lived*. By adapting Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story into a comic book, stage drama, and local opera, Chinese intellectuals transformed the Vietnamese patriotic figure into a socialist hero. Moreover, this socialist character was also accepted and acknowledged by North Vietnam, functioning as an ideological tool to encourage Vietnam's young people to participate in socialist construction.

Before being performed on a diplomatic stage, Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story had been widely circulated among Chinese readers through translations of his biography, adaptations as comic books, and operas performed by provincial troupes. First translated by Hanoi's Foreign Languages Publishing House and republished by Beijing's People Literature Publishing House in July 1965, Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's biography sold nearly 3,000,000 copies in China by September 1965.¹⁶ The biography was also adapted into comic books by the People's Art Publishing House and the Shanghai Art Publishing House. In October 1965, the Ping Opera *pingju*¹⁷ Theatre of China performed Trỗi's story to an audience of over 1,000 in Beijing. After the first

¹⁶ *People's Daily* published an essay to introduce the popularity of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's biography in October 16th, 1965. In addition to its direct sales, the essay observes that the biography was also serialized in seven journals including *Beijing Daily*, *Guangzhou Daily*, *Art of the Army*, *Chinese Youth*, and so on. The essay also introduces how the biography affected Chinese readers: "Many readers and audience wrote letters to the publishing houses and broadcasts, expressing their respect to the hero and resolution to support the anti-American war in Vietnam. Many students from colleges and middle schools said they will learn revolutionary spirit from Trỗi, working and studying for the anti-imperialist revolution."

¹⁷ Ping Opera *pingju* is a form of Chinese local opera originating in Hebei province in northern China. Developed from Peking Opera, pingju's dialogue is more colloquial, which made it more popular with the working classes. In 1950, the National Ping Opera Theater was established in Beijing, focusing on staging operas about modern and contemporary stories in China. See Qin, Huasheng. *Zhongguo Ping Ju Fa Zhan Shi*. Di 1 ban., Lü you jiao yu chu ban she, 2008.

performance, the playscript of pingju's version was circulated by provincial troupes across China¹⁸.

To make stage dramas, comic books or vernacular operas for Chinese audience based on the biography is also to suggest a commonality between the patriotic struggle in Vietnam and the socialist experience in China. This commonality is also a medium that can arouse the Chinese audience's transnational imagination, making them not only feel for Vietnam but also feel with Vietnam. In the Chinese translations and adaptations of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's biography, both nationalist discourse and socialist tropes are mobilized to foster the Chinese audience's transnational imagination, which proves the discursive and ideological compatibility between nationalism and socialism. As the acknowledgment of the comic book about Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story suggests, the Beijing's publishers of this pamphlet have three goals: "To support the Vietnamese people's great struggle to save the fatherland and resist the Americans, to protect the socialist enterprise of our nation, and to support revolutionary movements launched by people around the world (Yuenan Yingxiong Ruan Wenzhui np)". These goals indicated by the publishers are also the main tropes highlighted in the Chinese cultural products about Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story.

Whereas the biography narrated by Phan Thị Quyên does not provide readers with a detailed explanation why Trỗi decided to join the group of secret agents, the comic book of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story stresses his class identity as a proletarian electrician, claiming that it is his class consciousness that drives him to struggle for national reunification. In contrast to the

¹⁸ According to an essay published in the *Theatrical Journal (Xiju Bao)* in 1965, the Ping opera version of *Nguyễn Văn Trỗi* was first performed on October 3rd in 1965 and attended by thousands of Chinese from schools, the government, and factories: "The performance is very successful. Over 1,000 people watched the drama, following the development of the plot, crying and clapping."

biography, which primarily focuses on narrating Trỗi's struggle against Saigon's policemen in prison, the comic book starts by introducing Trỗi's familial background, emphasizing how the French regime destroyed and impoverished his family. Living in poverty, Trỗi starts to question social inequality at a very early age: "Who makes the poor live such a bitter life?" "Why should the poor be badly treated? (4)" To answer the questions put forward by Trỗi, the comic book generalizes both French colonizers and American invaders in a same category of class enemy—both are criminals who caused hardship among workers and peasants.

To highlight Trỗi's hatred towards class enemies, the comic book version of Trỗi's biography fabricates a letter from him applying for the Vietnam's Youth Committee of Labor *Đoàn Thanh niên Lao động Việt Nam*: "My father is an anti-French veteran who was captured and tortured by the French. This filled my heart with hatred... I will fight until the end! (5)" This fictional letter emphasizes that Trỗi has transferred his hatred from the French colonizers to the American invaders. The design of this displacement of vengeance also implies the Chinese artists' understanding of Vietnam's revolution—the wars against French colonizers and American invaders reflect the continuity of the world revolution whose ultimate goal is to overturn the world hierarchy made by western colonial powers. These two periods of Vietnam's revolution are steps moving towards worldwide decolonization. Here, the comic book's depiction of Trỗi's motive to participate in the revolution is based on both class struggle and patriotic spirit.

The cultural products based on Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's story as it circulated in China also take the trope of world revolution as a medium to cultivate the Chinese audience's transnational

identification.¹⁹ The *pingju* version of Trỗi's story also depicts how Trỗi's revolutionary spirit encourages people around the world to launch struggles against imperialism. The ending of the *pingju* depicts Trỗi as "the son of the world proletariat," whose arrest and death have aroused people's sympathy around the world. Xin Fengxia, the famous *pingju* actress who performed as Trỗi's wife, sings an aria infused with internationalist ideology:

Brother Trỗi, my family!

People around the world care about you.

See, the fire is burning the whole world;

Listen, the war drum is beating across each continent;

The huge waves are rolling on the south sea,

The sun is rising on the east sea,

The people of the north sea embrace the spirit of anti-imperialism,

Our black brothers in the west are in bloody struggle!

See, hundreds and thousands of flags are waving in the sky!

The steps moving forward are like the wind,

The people around the world will be liberated.

Brother Trỗi, you are like a great bell of revolution,

When the bell rings, you will hear echoes from all over the world.

¹⁹ The global influence of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi is not a fictional phenomenon created by Chinese artists. After learning that Trỗi was going to be executed by Saigon police, a Venezuelan guerilla captured a colonel of the U.S. Embassy in order to push Saigon's government to stay the execution. (By John Maffre The Washington Post, Foreign Service. (1964, Oct 11). *Vietnamese terrorist is spared. The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973) Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/142145030?accountid=10267>) In Cuba, Nguyễn Văn Trỗi is also regarded as a revolutionary icon. In a 1967' issue of *For Vietnam*, a journal issued by The Tricontinental Committee, the editor introduces his story and exalts him as "the hero of world revolution." See Tricontinental Committee of Support to Vietnam. *For Vietnam*. Tricontinental Committee of Support for Viet Nam.

.....

Hundreds and thousands of revolutionary bells,
Will keep tolling until the world revolution succeeds.²⁰

This aria is performed in the last scene of the opera. Sung out excitedly and firmly by the actress, it expresses the internationalist posture of the opera. The *pingju* artists' emphasis on the international influence of Trỗi suggests that they have situated Vietnam in the center of the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle, taking the DRV as a revolutionary model which people around the world should follow. By positioning “the south”, “the north”, “the east” and “black brothers” in a synchronic dimension of anti-imperialist struggle, the Chinese artists have showed their imagination of a transnational community bound by the expectation of world revolution.

The *pingju* adaptation of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's biography also played an important role in cultural diplomacy between China and North Vietnam. In December of 1965, Lê Thanh Nghị, the vice prime minister of the DRV, and representatives from the economic committees of North Vietnam were invited to watch the opera in Beijing. Trần Văn Thành, ambassador of the Viet Cong's diplomatic institution in Beijing²¹, wrote a review after watching the performance, confirming the internationalist value of the opera: “the enthusiasm of Chinese artists has shown that revolutionary people around the world have started to support the anti-American enterprise of South Vietnam” (Trần 6). Trần's review highlights the mutual identification between China and Vietnam, revealing the logic of transnational solidarity of staging the Vietnam war in

²⁰ The transcript of the opera is transcribed from the audio document provided by Mr. Zhang Jinsong's personal collection. He generously shares the audio material on his website about the history and culture of pingju. See http://www.sohu.com/a/206683842_650649

²¹ In 1964, the National Front for the Liberation of Southern Vietnam (Viet Cong) established its own representative committee in Beijing. This committee had the status of an independent diplomatic institution. Trần Văn Thành was the first ambassador. See September 19th, 1964's *People's Daily*.

socialist China. On the one hand, he appreciates the Chinese artists' endeavor, understanding the Chinese theatrical stage as a "home front" of the anti-American struggle that will "encourage Vietnamese people to move forward bravely, to struggle for the final success, and to achieve the glorious revolutionary enterprise. (6)" On the other hand, Trần emphasizes that it is the patriotic spirit embedded in the Vietnam war that inspires the Chinese artists to create such a great opera: "Why do the Chinese artists decide to take South Vietnam as a source for artistic creation and theatrical performance?... The struggle in Vietnam, I think, is attractive to every nation that is fighting for achieving and consolidating national sovereignty, justice, and liberation. The struggle of Vietnam has deeply influenced revolutionary people around the world. (6)"

Moreover, Trần confirms the historical realism of the plot, scene, and the war experience presented by the Chinese artists. According to his review, realism is delivered by the ideological commonality shared by Chinese artists and the Vietnamese people: "If Chinese artists did not have the same revolutionary emotion as the people from South Vietnam do, if they did not hate American imperialists, if they did not take the struggle in South Vietnam as their own struggle, if Chinese art workers did not have correct political instruction, it would be impossible to represent the war experience in South Vietnam vividly and precisely. (6)" In Trần's understanding, practicing and performing the opera of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi offers a way for the Chinese artists to experience, learn, and imitate his revolutionary spirit, through which the Chinese artists can cultivate their transnational identification: "Only by getting familiar with Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's life and ideals can the artists act as Nguyễn Văn Trỗi on a stage. (6)"

Chinese commentators on the opera also identify the cultural practice of performing Vietnam's struggle as a kind of training to cultivate Chinese artists' transnational sympathy and internationalist belief. However, in their understanding, the realist representation of the Vietnam

war comes not merely from learning and imitating Trỗi's patriotic spirit, but also from constructing socialism with workers, peasants, and soldiers:

Directors and actors have not been to Vietnam. They do not have the opportunity to experience life in Vietnam empirically. However, many of them have experienced the Sino-Japanese war and the civil war, and many of them are deeply engaged in the revolutionary life with workers, peasants, and soldiers. These experiences have shaped their emotions, encouraging them to sacrifice for the people's liberation... We should transform any type of drama with the topic of international struggle from a proletarian position. Now, the most important theatrical theme about international struggle is anti-imperialism. Our socialist life is compatible with any anti-imperialist experience. The transformation we have experienced through engaging in the lives of workers, peasants, and soldiers has made a decisive contribution to [adapting] the opera (Lin 25).

Just as Trần, who attributes the ideological commonality between China and Vietnam to a patriotic empathy towards the war in Vietnam, Chinese commentators also exalt the proletarian character shared by Nguyễn Văn Trỗi and Chinese workers, peasants, and soldiers. Nevertheless, both Trần and the Chinese theatrical commentators expand the transnational solidarity between two socialist regimes to an internationalist ideology, expressing their expectation for a socialist cosmopolitanism.

Through translating Nguyễn Văn Trỗi's biography into comic books, stage dramas, and local operas, the Chinese writers and artists depict him as a revolutionary icon and a socialist hero representing the global proletariat. These socialist characteristics of Nguyễn Văn Trỗi were also circulated back to Vietnam, functioning as a spiritual source for educating people and creating a model socialist hero. In December of 1965, Nhân Dân (The People) published an

essay to introduce the life of a young Chinese soldier, Wang Jie 王杰, who sacrificed his life by protecting the Chinese militia from being bombed by landmines during a military maneuver. The essay depicts Wang Jie as a socialist hero, attributing his selfless behavior to his communist ideal and the socialist society he lives in: “Why does Wang Jie have such a great morality? It is because he has cultivated the most advanced, correct worldview—the worldview of communism..... It is only in a socialist country that he can cultivate this great worldview. (Điều 3)”

The essay also suggests a parallel between Wang Jie’s sacrifice and Nguyễn Văn Trỗi’s story, claiming that the two figures are heroic models for the young generation of Vietnamese, who “have the great historical tasks of overcoming the American invaders, liberating the South, and supporting the world revolution. They have already prepared to take Wang Jie and Nguyễn Văn Trỗi as heroic models and to sacrifice themselves for revolution. (Điều 3)” By categorizing Wang Jie and Nguyễn Văn Trỗi as “socialist heroes,” the essay creates an equivalence between the national struggle in Vietnam and the socialist construction in China. The mutual circulation of socialist heroism between China and Vietnam highlights their collective identification of a proletarian community. This ideological equivalence not only contributes to transnational solidarity but also serves the domestic politics of the two socialist regimes.

The Anti-revisionist Consensus

In much the same way that Chinese artists translated the patriotic figure of Vietnam into a context of domestic socialist construction and anti-imperialist world revolution, North Vietnamese writers took the anti-bourgeois movement in China as an ideological source for war

propaganda. In the autumn of 1964, the Central Theatrical Troupe of Vietnam performed a Chinese drama, *Sentinels under the Neon Lights*, on the stage at the National Theater in Hanoi (Nhà Hát Trung Ương Việt Nam)²². First formally performed by the Frontier Theatrical Troupe in Beijing, the drama tells a story about how the Eighth Company of the Chinese Liberation Army struggled against consumerism and the KMT's spies after liberating Shanghai. Through showing the Eighth Company's battle to transform a capitalist city infused with commercial allure into a socialist city preparing for industrialization, the drama reveals the importance of the anti-bourgeois mission of the new-found socialist country.

There are two factors that drove North Vietnam to stage *Sentinels*. First, as *Nhân Dân*, the official media of the VWP announced, the primary motive for Vietnamese troupes to perform this drama is to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the PRC: "The performance is designed for celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC and consolidating the friendship between China and Vietnam. The directors and artists from Chinese troupe spent two months to help us to stage the drama in Vietnam, which shows the sincere and passionate love shared among the artists from two countries... (Đào 5)" The two-month process of preparation is also recorded by Lu Wei, the Chinese director of *Sentinels under the Neon Lights*. In his memoir published on *People's Daily* in 2010, Lu Wei says that it is the news about North Korea's decision to rehearse *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* that reminds him of the experience of preparing the drama in North Vietnam. According to Lu's memoir, the drama was collaboratively performed by Chinese and Vietnamese artists in two languages. The dialogue of Chinese actors/actresses is translated through simultaneous interpretation to the Vietnamese

²² The detailed information about this performance can be found in *Nhân Dân*, Số 3838, 3 Tháng Mười 1964; ; Lưu Trọng Lưu, "Vài cảm nghĩ sau khi xem vở kịch 'Đứng gác dưới ánh đèn nê-ông'", *Văn Nghệ*, October 9, 1964: 17-19; *People's Daily*, October 17, 1964: 3.

audience. However, it is still a challenge for performers who are expected to communicate with their foreign partners while speaking in a different language. Lu does not take the linguistic difference as a barrier for communication, for “(both Vietnamese and Chinese artists) shared the same anti-bourgeois emotion.” (Lu 8) In addition to highlighting this emotional commonality, Lu also takes the artists’ endeavor to get familiar with the bi-lingual dialogue and overcome linguistic difference as a way of constructing transnational solidarity between Vietnam and China, since this translingual practice encourages the artists to learn, digest, and enact the revolutionary spirit contributed by performers from each country.

However, the celebration of the PRC’s fifteenth anniversary and the endeavor to construct Sino-Vietnamese friendship cannot fully explain why the drama *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* was chosen to be performed on the stage of North Vietnam. As a cultural import from China, the country that was taken as the socialist future by VWP’s propaganda, *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* also functioned as an ideological model serving North Vietnam’s domestic politics of anti-revisionism.²³ First caused by Mao’s disagreement with Nikita Khrushchev’s project of de-Stalinization and peaceful coexistence with the Western world, the Sino-Soviet split shook the solidarity within the socialist bloc during the Cold War. This split was widened by Soviet support for India in the Sino-Indian border dispute in the late 1950s, and the Soviet Union’s Twenty-second Congress in October 1961. The Congress accepted Khrushchev’s proposal to remove Stalinist and Leninist influence, declaring that the Soviet

²³ My historicization of anti-revisionist movement in North Vietnam is primarily based on Martin Grossheim’s study. In his study about the VWP’s cultural policy under the anti-revisionist tendency, Grossheim uses plentiful materials from the German Democratic Republic archives, DRV periodicals, and interviews with Vietnamese informants to contour a detailed view of the VWP’s agency in the anti-revisionist movement during the Vietnam War. See Grossheim, Martin. “The Lao Động Party, Culture and the Campaign against ‘Modern Revisionism’: The Democratic Republic of Vietnam Before the Second Indochina War.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2013, pp. 80–129. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/vs.2013.8.1.80.

Communist Party is a party of the whole people. The declaration convinced Mao that “Khrushchev had completely betrayed the principle of class struggle and abandoned the Soviet party’s claim to represent the revolutionary interest of the proletarian class” (Zhai 123).

The Sino-Soviet split forced the CCP to seek new alignment with Afro-Asian countries. Liu Shaoqi, the state president of PRC, visited North Vietnam in May 1963. During Liu’s visit in North Vietnam, he gave a speech at the Nguyễn Ái Quốc Party School in Hanoi, harshly criticizing the tendency of modern revisionism:

“The international communist movement is now in a crucial period of utmost importance. An acute struggle on a worldwide scale is going on between the Marxist-Leninists and the modern revisionists over a series of important problems of principle. The polemics are centered on whether the people of the world should carry out revolutions or not and whether the proletarian Parties should lead the world's people in revolutions or not. The course of this struggle has a bearing on whether the entire cause of the proletariat and the working people throughout the world will succeed or fail, and on the destiny of the whole of mankind. On questions of such an important struggle of principle, we cannot act as lookers-on or follow a middle course. (Liu np)”

Liu’s speech emphasizes the leadership of the proletarian parties and the importance of “leading the world’s people in revolution,” which contradicted the Soviet stance of peaceful coexistence. In September 1963, Zhou Enlai met with leaders from the VWP, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and the Lao People’s Party (LPP), promising that “China would serve as a rear area for the revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia and do its utmost to support the anti-imperialist struggle of Southeast Asian countries. (Zhai 119)” Compared to the Soviet Union’s indifference to the hot war in Indochina and Khrushchev’s inclination toward coexistence, the

CCP's support drove some leaders of North Vietnam to lean toward China in the Sino-Soviet conflict, viewing Khrushchev as a revisionist just as the CCP was arguing.²⁴

North Vietnam's inclination towards China and the anti-revisionist tendency was also visible in cultural policies. According to Martin Grossheim, after Liu's visit and Zhou's meeting, the VWP consolidated its anti-revisionist stance and started to restrict cultural imports from the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. At the same time, the party also launched a campaign to avoid bourgeois influence. Both Vietnamese and foreign literature with bourgeois characters were censored. For example, Hà Minh Tuân, a famous novelist who also worked at the Literature Publishing House, was one of the targets of the anti-bourgeois campaign. His novel, *Vào Đời*, which metaphorically satirizes the VWP's bureaucratism, was viewed as "a horrible book" (cited in Grossheim 93) by the DRV's official literary periodicals such as *Văn Nghệ*. Hà Minh Tuân then lost his position in the Literature Publishing House in Hanoi.

The Chinese drama *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* was exported to North Vietnam under the ideological tendency of anti-revisionism and the political campaign against bourgeois influence. It is the anti-revisionist ideology that drove North Vietnam to restrict cultural products from the Soviet Union and accept more Chinese cultural material. The anti-bourgeois campaign, in concert with an anti-revisionist tendency, explains why a drama aimed at criticizing capitalist consumerism was chosen to be staged in Hanoi. One review published on *Nhân Dân* takes the

²⁴ According to Zhai Qiang's study, among the leaders of the VWP, Lê Duẩn, who had potential to hold the entire politburo, was more inclined to China, while Trường Chinh attempted to follow Khrushchev's stance of peaceful coexistence. Võ Nguyên Giáp, an important general in the Vietnam People's Army, tended to take the neutral position. He was marginalized by Lê Duẩn for being "pro-Soviet". However, since North Vietnam still did not want a permanent break with the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union, the anti-revisionist discourse put forward by the VWP focused on Tito instead of Khrushchev. See Zhai, Qiang. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

drama as a model that can debunk the trick of “peaceful coexistence”, revealing how this revisionist stance “cripples revolutionary vigilance and undermines the fighting spirit. (Cited in Grossheim 93)”

Anti-revisionist discourse is also highlighted in the reviews and adaptations of *Letters from the South* by Chinese audiences and artists. In his comments on *Letters from the Vietnam*, Yuan Ying, the editor of People’s Daily, stresses the anti-revisionist character of the text: “The collection of the letters is a condemnation of the modern revisionists... The modern revisionists devote themselves to sugaring the crimes of Americans, embracing these bloody butchers with great pleasure. The enemy will not openly declare their violence any longer. The bad becomes sophisticated. The revisionists, the clowns who support the devils, force the people to live with the devils in peace, to compete with the devils in peace, and to act out a peaceful transition under the imperialist weapons... (Yuan 26)”

Yuan’s reading practice is largely shaped by Maoist political discourse, which intends to challenge the hegemonic order within the socialist bloc designed by the Soviet Union. Depicting South Vietnam as an anti-revisionist model, he linked the Vietnam War with the movement of “combating and preventing revisionism” *fanxiu fangxiu* led by Mao. The language Yuan uses in the review, such as “living together in peace,” “competing in peace,” and “transiting in peace,” all come from Khrushchev’s speech at the 20th Party Congress of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev’s principles were later regarded as the mainstream of the revisionist tendency by the CCP: “If we concluded the strategies of the international communist movement as ‘living together in peace’, ‘competing in peace’, and ‘transiting in peace’, we would abandon the historical task of proletarian revolution, distorting the revolutionary principle of Marx and Lenin... **Invalid source specified.**” By celebrating the heroic spirit of South Vietnam and

criticizing the revisionist tendency of the Soviet Union, Yuan framed the image of the Vietnam War in Maoist discourse, taking *Letters from the South* as a tool for claiming the anti-revisionist stance of China.

In the PLA version of the stage play, the idea of democracy and freedom, which used to be pursued and deified by the revolutionary pioneers of the May Fourth generation, are now placed under harsh critique and regarded as an imperialist ploy. In the third scene of the play, Wen An, a high school teacher in South Vietnam, loses his job due to his participation in a workers' demonstration. Sitting in a café and looking at the chaotic street controlled by American troops, Wen An asks: "What do they mean by democracy? What do they mean by freedom? Look at how bad my life is... Americans always talk about 'the free world.' As far as I know, we only have the freedom to starve. We only have the freedom to be slaves of the American-Diem association. (30)" Wen An's words convey his aversion to the discourse of democracy and freedom; to Wen An, these seemingly universalist ideas are neither humanist nor enlightened: they are a plot of the imperialist nations. The play script also portrays the violence of the Vietnam War in detail, justifying the violent war by stressing the rights of the global proletarian class and opposing the revisionist discourse of "peaceful transformation" directly. The play script of *Letters* not only exposes the cruel behaviors of American troops but also celebrates the violent reaction of the Vietnamese people. In the sixth scene, Vietnamese villagers living in the strategic villages deploy traps made of sharpened bamboo, and the leaders from the Viet Cong who witness this plot praise their bravery and wisdom.

This depiction of violence echoes Chinese intellectuals' critique of the concept of universal humanity, which plays an important role in the anti-revisionist campaign. In an essay published on March 1960 issue of *Literary Criticism wenxue pinglun*, Qian Zhongwen and Ye

Shuifu harshly criticize the revisionist ideology embedded in literary works and theories. They stress that “criticizing revisionist thoughts is the most important task for our contemporary art workers.” Then they focus on Georg Lukacs’s theory of humanity: “Lukacs is a typical revisionist... He advocates the reconciliation of different classes, propagandizing universal humanity in his literary theory and depreciating socialist realist literature...” They argue that Lukacs’s aesthetic theory intends to “separate literature from the class struggle” and “obliterate the party’s instruction from literature”, which exposes his “bourgeois ideology” and “anti-socialist thoughts. (Zhongwen Qian; Shuifu Ye 126)” Qian and Ye position Mao’s thought as the only criterion to define what good humanity is. In the *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*, Mao introduced his perspective on the concept of universal humanity:

The fundamental point of departure for literature and art is love, love of humanity. Now love may serve as a point of departure, but there is a more basic one. Love as an idea is a product of objective practice... As for the so-called love of humanity, there has been no such all-inclusive love since humanity was divided into classes. All the ruling classes of the past were fond of advocating it, and so were many so-called sages and wise men, but nobody has ever really practiced it, because it is impossible in class society. There will be genuine love of humanity--after classes are eliminated all over the world. Classes have split society into many antagonistic groupings; there will be love of all humanity when classes are eliminated, but not now. We cannot love enemies, we cannot love social evils, our aim is to destroy them. This is common sense; can it be that some of our writers and artists still do not understand this? ²⁵

²⁵ See *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*
<https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-194205.htm>

Mao's argument did not deny the potential of universal humanity but highlighted the precondition of this universality: the "genuine love of humanity" will only exist after eliminating classes all over the world. The Maoist anticipation of the construction of universal sympathy and transnational identification rests on the homogeneity of class. Therefore, the practice of rewriting *Letters from the South*, a work saturated with nationalist consciousness, could not only focus on transforming sympathy for Vietnamese nationals into a love for the global proletarian class. More importantly, it was expected to design a propagandist discourse that can distinguish ally from enemy and serve the contemporary political struggle. The anti-revisionist ideology pitched against the Soviet Union drew a border within the socialist bloc, and thereby consolidated the transnational identification between China and Vietnam.

Conclusion

I have examined how the practice of translation and cultural exchange between China and Vietnam cultivated the transnational imagination of a socialist community in the middle 1960s. Through mobilizing people's nationalist empathy, highlighting the collective identity of a proletarian class, and excluding the common ideological enemies of imperialism and revisionism, the ideology of transnational solidarity was cooperatively formed by the two socialist regimes. However, no matter how firmly the two socialist regimes presented the ideology of transnational solidarity in literature and stage dramas, we should not neglect a fact that the transnational socialist community between China and Vietnam, in a political sense instead of the propagandist sense, was never really realized. Socialist transnationalism did not practically challenge the political system of the nation-state. In early 1979, China launched a war against socialist Vietnam in order to oppose Vietnam's invasion in Cambodia. This military

conflict between the socialist countries challenges the Marxist principle of socialist internationalism. Benedict Anderson takes the Sino-Vietnam conflict as evidence to prove how socialism is finally overwhelmed by nationalism: “[conflicts between Marxist regimes] serve to underline the fact that since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms—the People’s Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth... Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time. (2)” From this perspective, the system of the nation-state, instead of a transnational community based on socialism, has and will continue to dominate the world order.

This historical tendency seems to be incompatible with Zhang Xianliang’s novel, whose protagonist still keeps the memory of socialist solidarity after the war broke out between China and Vietnam, and uses the Maoist “comrade and brother” to address his Vietnamese prostitute. Does his behavior negate Anderson’s observation? How should we understand the relationship between the dominant political system of the nation-state—, and the socialist expectation for a global proletarian community?

The territorial sovereignty of the nation-state and people’s imagination of a transnational community are not incompatible. The Chinese artists’ transnational sympathy towards Vietnam was aroused by their nationalist empathy, an emotional ground that is presented in the translatability of fatherland as well as premised on the consensus of the system of nation-state. As I have analyzed, the trope of the fatherland was repeatedly used by Chinese artists in their adaptations and reviews of the literary works about the Vietnam War, all intended to inspire the audience to connect the anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam with the task of reunifying Taiwan.

This consensus about the nation-state system that provoked Chinese artists’ empathy with the nationalist struggle of Vietnam was highlighted in the emergency meeting for consolidating

Afro-Asian writers²⁶. At the closing ceremony of the conference, Guo Moruo gave a speech on the role of culture in the worldwide anti-imperialist movement. He started his speech by stressing the Chinese government's responsibility for supporting Vietnam: "China and Vietnam are as close as lips and teeth. We keep the closest socialist brotherhood. China will try our best to support Vietnam politically, morally, and economically... This is our obligation of proletarian internationalism." (Guo np) He encouraged Afro-Asian writers to "use their pens to mobilize people as well as consolidate people," and to produce "art works that represent the masses' struggle for national liberation." (Guo np) Guo Moruo also exalted the contribution of writers from other Afro-Asian countries: "progressive Afro-Asian writers have made great contributions to creating new national culture and new literary works for anti-imperialist revolutionary movements, which is worth being studied by Chinese writers." (Guo np) This acknowledgment of the revolutionary spirit of Afro-Asian writers is emphasized by the slogans announced in the end of the speech: "Long live Afro-Asian solidarity!" (Guo np)

Guo's speech suggested that the transnational solidarity of Afro-Asian countries is premised on achieving national liberation or unification of each country through the medium of "new national culture." As a representative of Vietnamese writers said during the meeting: "The war has nourished Vietnam's national literature... Writers from North Vietnam should create more heroic epics about the fatherland, making contributions to the revolutionary literature of

²⁶ In the summer of 1966, Beijing held an emergency meeting for consolidating Afro-Asian writers. The meeting had three significant agendas: to support Vietnam's struggle against anti-American invasion and reunifying the country; to clarify Afro-Asian writers' role in the anti-imperialist movement; to fight against cultural invasion launched by imperialism and colonialism, and by developing national cultures in Afro-Asian countries. See Zhongguo fu li hui. *China Reconstructs*. China Welfare Institute, 1989, pp. 38

Asia and the world... National culture and national literature cannot be separated from national sovereignty and independence.²⁷”

Both Guo Moruo and the Vietnamese representative emphasized the fundamental role of an independent national sovereignty in constructing the ideology of transnational solidarity. This transnationality is constructed within the framework of the nation-state, but the boundary of nation-states does not necessarily restrict people’s identification and imagination in a national territory, nor does it block a state from using the discourse of transnational solidarity to serve its domestic politics.

Entering through literature and theater, my study primarily focuses on how the two socialist states tried to reconcile the conceptual, discursive paradox between nationalism and internationalism in their practice of literary translation and theatrical adaptation. However, propagandist discourse can only uncover the ideological tendency of the socialist/third world transnationality. How this transnationality worked (or failed) in political, economics, and military dimension requires further study.

²⁷ See *People’s Daily*, June 29th, 1966:6

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